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AUTHOR Smith, Leslie Whitener; Coltrane, Robert
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ABSTRACT

Farmers and their families continue to provide the largest proportion of agricultural labor, but hired farmworkers are increasingly supplying a greater part of farm employment. This trend is expected to continue in the eighties with the hired labor proportion gradually increasing. Better information, including crucial individual state data on numbers of farmworkers, duration of employment, and key characteristics of workers, will be needed to assess current policies and legislation. The most significant hired farm labor issues of the eighties will be: improved employee benefits and workplace protections, such as farm safety regulations, workers' compensation, social security and unemployment insurance; stability of employment and income for hired farmworkers, possibly through agricultural worker placement programs; programs to show farm employers how to use hiring and personnel management techniques to improve labor-management relations and increase production efficiency; and the impact of technology on hired farmworkers. Currently, minority hired farmworkers, especially Hispanics, are more dependent on farmwork for income than other hired laborers in the agricultural sector. Less education and fewer marketable skills, combined with larger families, have aggravated minority farmworkers' social and economic problems. (Author)

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HIRED FARMWORKERS
Background and Trends for the Eighties

Leslie Whitener Smith
Robert Coltrane

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HIRED FARMWORKERS: BACKGROUND AND TRENDS FOR THE EIGHTIES, by Leslie Whitener Smith and Robert Coltrane. Economic Development Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture. Rural Development Research Report No 32

ABSTRACT

As farms become fewer and larger, hired farmworkers (2.7 million in 1979) are gradually replacing family members in the agricultural work force. Workers dependent on farmwork for their livelihood should be the focus of Government policy, rather than laborers doing farmwork on a casual or seasonal basis. Better information and more comprehensive data are needed to design laws to help solve the economic and social problems of farmworkers and their families.

Keywords: Hired farm labor, farm operators, agricultural labor, migrant farmworkers, agricultural labor policy, employment, earnings.

Washington, D.C. 20250 September 1981

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SUMMARY

Farmers and their families continue to provide the largest proportion of agricultural labor, but hired farmworkers are increasingly supplying a greater part of farm employment. This trend is expected to continue in the eighties with the hired labor proportion gradually increasing.

Better information, including crucial individual State data on numbers of farmworkers, duration of employment, and key characteristics of workers, will be needed to assess current policies and legislation. The most significant hired farm labor issues of the eighties will be:

- Improved employee benefits and workplace protections, such as farm safety regulations, workers' compensation, social security, and unemployment insurance.
- Stability of employment and income for hired farmworkers, possibly through agricultural worker placement programs.
- Programs to show farm employers how to use hiring and personnel management techniques to improve labor-management relations and increase production efficiency.
- The impact of technology on hired farmworkers.

Currently, minority hired farmworkers, and especially Hispanics, are more dependent on farmwork for income than other hired laborers in the agricultural sector. Young, White males constitute the largest segment of the hired farm work force, but their higher educational level and more marketable skills make them less dependent on agricultural earnings. By contrast, proportionally fewer hired minority farmworkers supplement their agricultural wages with other jobs. Less education and fewer marketable skills, combined with larger families, have aggravated minority farmworker social and economic problems.

Hired Farmworkers: Background and Trends for the Eighties

Leslie Whitener Smith and Robert Coltrane*

INTRODUCTION

Farm operators and their families still account for the largest proportion of labor used in agriculture, but hired farmworkers are providing a greater share of agricultural employment over time. This situation should continue in the eighties as farm employers seek hired laborers to do farmwork previously done by family members.

Overall, employment in agriculture has declined in recent decades, largely due to trends toward fewer and larger farms and increased mechanization. Annual farm employment in 1980 was only slightly more than one-third the 1950 level *(16)*.[1] However, farm family employment declined more than that for hired workers, leading to a gradual substitution of hired laborers for family workers.

This report examines historic and current trends in farm employment in the United States, focusing on the numbers and characteristics of hired farmworkers and migratory labor. Factors affecting the size and composition of the farm work force are identified, and probable farm employment trends in the eighties are examined.

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*Smith is a sociologist, and Coltrane is an economist, in the Economic Development Division, Economic Research Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

[1]Italicized numbers in parentheses indicate items in the References section.

The relative growth in importance of hired workers in farm production suggests several policy issues related to the agricultural production process and the welfare of hired workers and their families. These issues include both worker and management responsibilities and procedures, efforts to stabilize employment and earnings of farmworkers, and the need for evaluation of current farmworker programs and services. The issues are examined with the objective of defining those areas of primary importance to both a productive agriculture and the welfare of farmworkers.

AGRICULTURAL LABOR: PAST AND CURRENT LEVELS

The U.S. agricultural labor force is comprised of four groups: (1) farm operators and unpaid family members; (2) domestic hired farm labor; (3) foreign nationals brought into the country under the provisions of the H-2 Foreign Labor Certification Program; and (4) undocumented aliens employed in agricultural work.

Farm Operators and Family Members

Despite record numbers of farm consolidations in recent decades, the American farm is still predominantly a family operation. The number of family workers has consistently declined since around the turn of the century, falling from 10.2 million workers in 1910 to 2.4 million in 1980. Despite this decline, farm operators and their families still constituted about two-thirds of all persons employed on farms in 1980 (table 1).

The decrease in family farm employment has been largely due to changes in the structure of agriculture and subsequent declines in the number of farms. After the collapse of the plantation system in the late 1800's, improved farm production techniques and technological developments in transportation and marketing resulted in higher productivity levels, lower production costs, and higher farm income. These economic changes encouraged a move from subsistence farming to commercial

farming; however, they also led to farm enlargement, increased mechanization, and commodity specialization—moves that had serious implications for some farm families. As Holt *(6)* notes:

> The result for the farming industry as a whole . . . was that productive capacity increased more rapidly than

Table 1—Family and hired employment on farms

Year	Annual average farm employment[1]			Hired labor as a percentage of total farm employment	Total hired farm work force[2]
	Total	Family	Hired		
	Thousands			*Percent*	*Thousands*
1910	13,555	10,174	3,381	25	NA
1920	13,432	10,041	3,391	25	NA
1930	12,497	9,307	3,190	26	NA
1940	10,979	8,300	2,679	24	NA
1950	9,926	7,597	2,329	23	4,342
1955	8,381	6,345	2,036	24	NA
1960	7,057	5,172	1,885	27	3,693
1965	5,610	4,128	1,482	26	3,128
1970	4,523	3,348	1,175	26	2,488
1971	4,436	3,275	1,161	26	2,550
1972	4,373	3,228	1,146	26	2,809
1973	4,337	3,169	1,168	27	2,671
1974	4,389	3,075	1,314	30	2,737
1975	4,342	3,025	1,317	30	2,638
1976	4,374	2,997	1,377	31	2,767
1977	4,170	2,863	1,307	31	2,730
1978	3,957	2,689	1,268	32	NA
1979	3,774	2,501	1,273	34	2,652
1980	3,705	2,402	1,303	35	NA

NA = Not available.
[1]Average of quarterly estimates of number of jobs on farms.
[2]Total number of persons employed for at least 1 day during the year.
Sources: *(15, 18)*

> demand for farm products, reducing the prices of commodities. The smallest and most inefficient units were forced out of business, no longer able to provide an adequate income for a farm family. The land used by those units was absorbed by units that were expanding or it reverted to less intensive uses. The labor forced out of farming was replaced by capital investment on the expanding units. The total labor input in agriculture declined drastically as millions of farm families and hired farmworkers could no longer earn a living in agriculture.

The number of farms declined by nearly 3.6 million, from 6.1 million farms in 1940 to 2.5 million in 1978, and the number is expected to drop to around 1.8 million by the year 2000 *(17, 7)*. The projected decline in the number of farms will result in further reductions in the number of family workers.

Historical trends show that as the number of farms declines, average farm size increases. Average farm size increased from 175 acres in 1940 to 416 acres in 1978, largely as a result of the decline in the number of farms under 500 acres. By the year 2000, the largest 1 percent of farms is expected to account for about half of all farm production *(7)*. The current trend toward fewer farms is due to many factors, including technological development, economies of scale, tax laws, price instability, differences in operators' managerial ability, capital requirements, credit availability, foreign trade arrangements, and Government programs and regulations *(7, 11)*.

Hired Farmworkers

Farm family workers still provide the major portion of labor in agriculture; however, hired workers have gradually replaced family workers over the last three decades even as hired worker numbers have declined. Hired workers accounted for about 23 percent of annual average employment in 1950, but by 1980 the

proportion had increased to 35 percent.[2] Furthermore, the rate of substitution accelerated slightly in the last decade. Hired employment as a percentage of all farm employment increased from 23 to 26 percent between 1950 and 1970. However, between 1970 and 1980, the proportion increased from 26 to 35 percent (see table 1).

Although hired workers have replaced some family workers in recent decades, the total number of hired farmworkers employed during a year has decreased by almost 40 percent, falling from a high of 4.3 million in 1950 to about 2.7 million in 1979 (see table 1).[3] Most of the losses occurred in the fifties and sixties. In fact, during the seventies the number of workers appears to have stabilized at 2.6 to 2.7 million annually.

Similar trends were observed for migrant farmworkers. The number of migrants dropped from 422,000 to 217,000 between 1949 and 1979, a decrease of almost 50 percent. While the numbers fluctuated in the fifties and sixties, they tended to stabilize at around 200,000 annually during the seventies *(15)*.

The decline in the numbers of hired farmworkers was largely due to the adoption of new production and marketing technology on farms, including labor-reducing machines and higher yielding crops and livestock. The shift to larger farms and crop specialization provided the opportunity for mechanization and adoption of other labor productivity enhancing technology.

In response to the decline in employment opportunities in agriculture, Federal programs under the Economic Opportunity Act and the Manpower Development and Training Act were developed in the sixties to provide occupational training, job development, and comprehensive supportive services to help migrant families withdraw permanently from the migrant

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[2] The annual average employment of hired farmworkers is the average of quarterly estimates of jobs on farms.

[3] The number of hired farmworkers cited here and in the remainder of the report is based on the total number of persons employed for at least 1 day during the year.

stream. These programs were supplemented with the Comprehensive Migrant Manpower Program of 1971 which was also designed to help migrant and seasonal farmworkers find alternative year-round employment in the nonfarm sector. Opponents of these programs charged that they encouraged workers needed for farm production to move out of agriculture. However, it is not clear to what extent the programs actually contributed to the reduction in the size of the farm labor force. Undoubtedly, economic factors affecting the number, size, and type of farms played a more important role in the farm labor adjustment process.

During the seventies, however, hired worker displacement slowed considerably as large-scale mechanization and technological innovations with large labor displacement potential leveled off *(2)*. While planting and harvesting of many crops (including cotton and various grains) were widely mechanized during the fifties and sixties, large-scale mechanization did not occur in the more labor-intensive fruit, nut, and vegetable crops. In addition, in response to criticism of earlier farmworker programs, the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) of 1973 was developed with dual farmworker objectives to help improve the lives and skills of those wishing to remain in agriculture as well as to provide alternatives to agricultural labor. The available evidence suggests that experienced seasonal farmworkers are now more likely to combine nonfarm activities with their farmwork, rather than leaving the farm work force entirely *(15)*.

Foreign Nationals and the H-2 Program

Legally admitted foreign workers have been an important part of the farm labor force for decades, but their importance, measured in numbers of workers, has diminished in recent years. Almost 5 million braceros (Mexican laborers permitted to work in the United States for a limited time) worked on U.S. farms between 1942 and 1964. The Bracero Program (P.L. 78) was the major legislative vehicle allowing entry of these workers. P.L. 78 authorized an official agreement between

Mexico and the United States, designed to meet the U.S. wartime need for supplemental farm labor and also to legalize and protect Mexican workers from exploitation in this country. The number of legally admitted workers reached a peak of 445,000 in 1956 and then declined to fewer than half that number by 1964. This reduction was due to increases in farm mechanization, tightening of certification requirements, and more rigid enforcement of wage agreements and guarantees *(8)*.

Since the termination of the Bracero Program in 1964, the Immigration and Nationality Act (P.L. 414) has been the major mechanism for legally admitting foreign agricultural workers. This Act authorizes the U.S. Department of Labor to administer the Foreign Labor Certification Program, often referred to as the H-2 Program, which permits employers to bring foreign workers into the United States to do temporary work. Before workers can be admitted, the Department of Labor must certify that there are insufficient numbers of domestic workers available who are willing and qualified to perform the work needed, and that the entry of the foreign workers will not adversely affect either the wage rate or working conditions of domestic workers doing similar work.

The number of H-2 workers entering this country to do farmwork has decreased over time, but has remained relatively stable over the last few years. Each year, 15,000 to 18,000 foreign workers are certified for agricultural employment and logging *(18)*. In 1979, almost half of the workers harvested sugarcane in Florida; over one-third harvested apples in the Eastern States; and the remainder were engaged in sheepherding in the Western States and logging in the Northeastern States.

The H-2 workers have little impact on the overall U.S. farm labor market, but they do have a significant impact on some areas, particularly sugar production in Florida and apple production in the Eastern States. The H-2 workers accounted for less than 1 percent of all hired workers in 1979. By contrast, foreign workers constituted about 13 percent of hired farmworkers at the height of the Bracero Program in 1956.

The H-2 Program is the focal point of a continuing controversy between the Department of Labor and growers requesting worker certification. Except for sugarcane cutters, the Labor Department maintains that a sufficient number of migrant and local workers is available to meet grower demands, while the growers maintain that there are not enough workers available at peak labor demand periods. The controversy is likely to continue and it may spread to include producers of other commodities. Since 1979, for example, the Department of Labor has received new requests for worker certification from both citrus and tobacco growers.

Undocumented Workers

Because of their numbers, undocumented workers have a much greater impact on the U.S. farm labor market than do legally admitted foreign workers. However, it is impossible to make reliable estimates of the number of illegal workers in the country or the number working in agriculture because of the clandestine nature of their entry into the United States. Each year, as many as 700,000 illegal aliens are apprehended, and estimates of the size of the illegal population living in the United States range from 4 to 12 million (*12*). Slightly over 100,000 undocumented aliens are apprehended each year in agriculture, but these figures are not accurate indicators of the numbers working in agriculture. As many as 355,000 undocumented workers may be employed annually in agriculture with most concentrated in the Southwestern and Pacific Coast States, and the remainder scattered throughout the Nation (*10*).

Most of the information available on undocumented workers in the United States is based on official testimony, hearsay, and unreliable statistics. Additional quantitative information is needed to estimate more accurately the impact of illegal workers on the farm labor market, and to provide the foundation for policy regarding undocumented workers.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF HIRED FARMWORKERS

Agriculture in America has been primarily a family endeavor, but hired farmworkers have made a significant contribution. Over time, the character of the hired farm work force has changed considerably. During the colonial period, farmworkers were comprised largely of Indians, convicts, indentured servants from England, and slaves from Africa. In the 1800's, agriculture provided opportunities for employment to a large number of immigrants from Germany, Ireland, and Scandinavia. Many of these immigrants settled in the Northeast and North Central States. In the Southwest, the hired farm labor force has been comprised of a succession of minority groups starting with the Chinese and followed by the Japanese, Filipinos, and Mexicans. Mexican workers have historically been employed in the United States in a cyclical fashion depending on the economic situation and supply of available domestic labor (4).

Although demographic characteristics of hired farmworkers have changed, the tendency for these workers to be at the bottom of the income scale and generally to have few other economic opportunities has persisted to the present.

Demographic Characteristics

In 1979, approximately 2.7 million persons 14 years of age and older in the United States worked on farms for cash wages or salary at some time during the year (15).[4] These workers were predominantly young, White, and male, and the majority lived off the farm. Only two of every five hired farmworkers were heads of households; most were spouses or other family members, specifically:

- 57 percent of hired farmworkers were under 25 years of age; one-fourth were between 14 and 17 years,

[4]See Pollack (9) for additional information on sampling procedures, survey design, and statistical reliability of these data.

- 22 percent were female,
- 75 percent were White,
- 4 out of 10 farmworkers lived in the South, and
- the majority (83 percent) lived off the farm.

Contrary to the popular image, racial/ethnic minorities do not constitute the major portion of the hired farm work force (fig. 1). In 1979, 75 percent were White, 12 percent were Hispanic, and 13 percent were Black and Other.[5] However, the proportion of minority farmworkers varied by region. About 53 percent of the farmworkers in California, Nevada, and Arizona were Hispanic, and about 34 percent of the workers in eight Southern States (Kentucky, Tennessee, North Carolina, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, and Florida) were Blacks and Others. The majority of farmworkers in other regions were White.

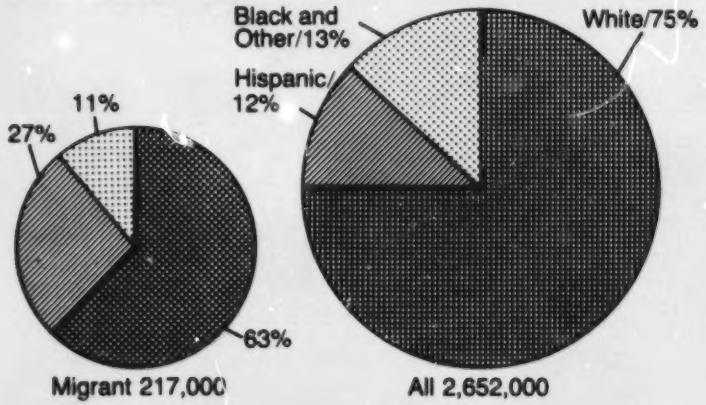
While the minority groups account for a relatively small number of hired farmworkers nationwide, minorities, especially Hispanics, are more dependent on agriculture than Whites. Minority workers were more likely than White workers to cite hired farmwork as their principal activity during 1979, and for the large majority, hired farmwork was their only employment. Furthermore, White workers were more likely than Hispanics and Blacks and Others to move out of hired farmwork as they became older (fig. 2). This suggests that farmwork serves more as an entry level and/or a supplemental job for Whites, while minority workers are more likely to depend on agriculture as their major source of support.

The relatively greater dependence on agriculture by minority workers may be due to their lower levels of education and the

[5]Hispanic refers to all those who identified themselves as Mexican American, Chicano, Mexican, Mexicano, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central or South American, or other Hispanic. White refers to White persons other than those of Hispanic origin. Black and Other includes Blacks, Indians, Chinese, Japanese, and others not of Hispanic origin. For simplicity of presentation, these mutually exclusive groups are termed Hispanic, White, and Black and Other.

Figure 1.

Racial/Ethnic Background of Hired Farmworkers, 1979



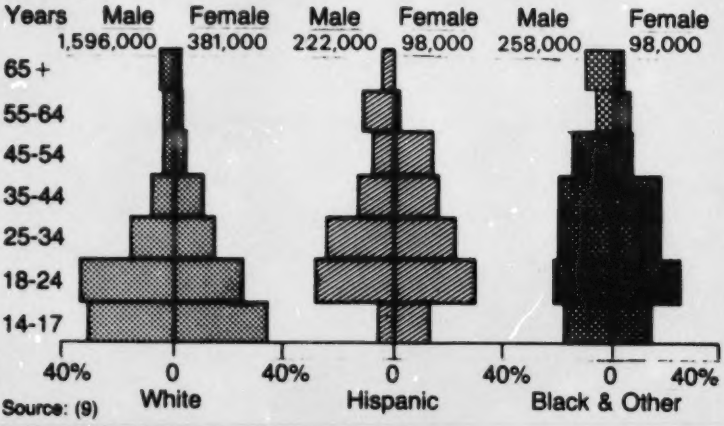
Source: (9)

lack of alternatives to farmwork. Many hired farm jobs require few skills and training, and workers with low educational attainment compete effectively for these jobs.

Hired farmworkers, in general, have lower educational levels than most other occupational groups. In 1979, hired farmworkers 25 years and older had a median educational level of 10.4 years compared with 12.5 years for the total U.S. population 25 years and older. However, educational attainment was even lower for minority farmworkers. Hispanic farmworkers had a median educational level of only 5.4 years. Blacks and Others reached only a slightly higher level, with 7.7 years of schooling. Whites had a median 12.3 years of school completed.

Figure 2.

Hired Farmworkers, by Age, Sex, and Racial/Ethnic Group, 1979



Source: (9)

Employment Characteristics

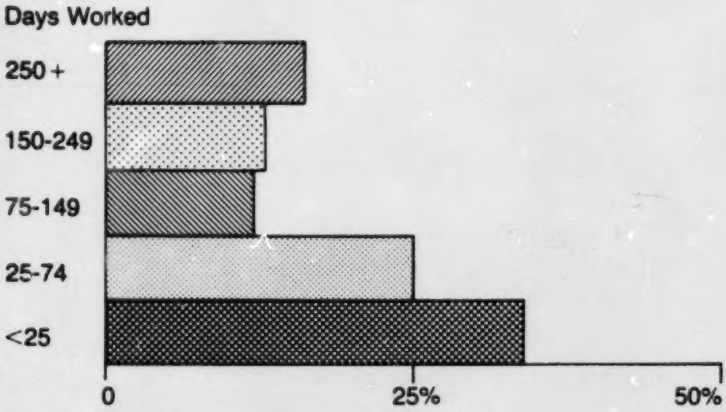
In 1979, the majority of farmworkers were employed on a casual (less than 25 days) or seasonal (25 to 149 days) basis (fig. 3). Almost three-fourths of the laborers worked for less than 150 days during 1979. Many of the casual and seasonal workers were students and housewives who worked only a few weeks a year, either during harvest or some other peak labor demand period. Only 16 percent of all hired farmworkers worked on a year-round basis for 250 days or more; another 13 percent worked from 150 to 249 days during the year. However, those working 150 days or more accounted for 73 percent of the total days of farmwork.

Additional data illustrate the weak labor force attachment of most hired farmworkers:

- Almost half (47 percent) of all farmworkers were

Figure 3.

Hired Farmworkers, by Days of Farmwork, 1979



Source: (9)

outside the labor force most of the year; more than three-fourths of these workers were students.

- Less than one-third did hired farmwork as a principal activity during the year.
- About 34 percent of all workers did less than 25 days of farmwork during the year.
- About 44 percent of all workers have been employed in farmwork for 3 years or less.

The variation in duration of employment caused annual earnings to vary considerably among workers (table 2). All hired farmworkers averaged $4,185 in annual earnings from all farm and nonfarm sources in 1979, with over half of the earnings ($2,444) from farmwork. Persons citing nonfarm employment as their primary activity earned $8,342, with only about 15 percent ($1,210) of the earnings from farmwork. Those

Table 2—Hired farmworkers' average annual earnings by primary employment status, 1979[1]

Primary employment status[2]	Total				Farmwork only		Both farm and nonfarmwork		
	Workers		Total annual earnings	Annual farm earnings	Workers	Annual farm earnings	Workers	Total annual earnings	Annual farm earnings
	Number	Percentage distribution							
	Thousands	*Percent*	*—Dollars—*		*Thousands*	*Dollars*	*Thousands*	*—Dollars—*	
In labor force	1,393	53	6,602	3,789	732	5,573	661	7,740	1,813
Hired farmwork	759	29	6,089	5,843	656	6,042	103	6,388	4,579
Other farmwork[3]	90	3	3,406	1,879	54	1,580	36	[4]	[4]
Nonfarmwork	496	19	8,348	1,210	—	—	496	8,348	1,210
Unemployed	48	2	[4]	[4]	22	[4]	26	[4]	[4]
Not in labor force	1,259	47	1,510	956	792	1,029	467	2,327	834
Keeping house	176	7	1,215	890	139	896	37	[4]	[4]
Attending school	956	36	1,434	839	558	917	397	2,162	729
Other	127	5	2,484	1,935	95	1,883	32	[4]	[4]
All hired farmworkers	2,652	100	4,185	2,444	1,524	3,212	1,128	5,501	1,408
All migrant farmworkers	217	8	4,852	2,277	98	3,258	120	6,155	1,476

— = Not applicable.
[1]Number of workers may not add to totals due to rounding.
[2]Refers to respondent's major or chief activity during the year.
[3]Includes operating a farm and unpaid family labor.
[4]Averages not shown where base is less than 50,000 workers.
Source: (9)

citing hired farmwork as their primary activity earned less; this group averaged $6,089 in total earnings, with almost 96 percent derived from farm employment. Housewives and students received the lowest total earnings and farm earnings of any group. Holt (6) summarizes the reasons earnings from hired farmwork are low:

> Hired farmworkers' earnings are kept low by a potentially large supply of unskilled workers, the highly competitive structure of an industry with many small producer employers, and the lack of organization and bargaining power among workers. On the other hand, agricultural employment is one of the last remaining major employment opportunities for youth, low-productivity rural workers, and persons unwilling or unable to cope with the regimen and discipline imposed by a highly industrialized society.

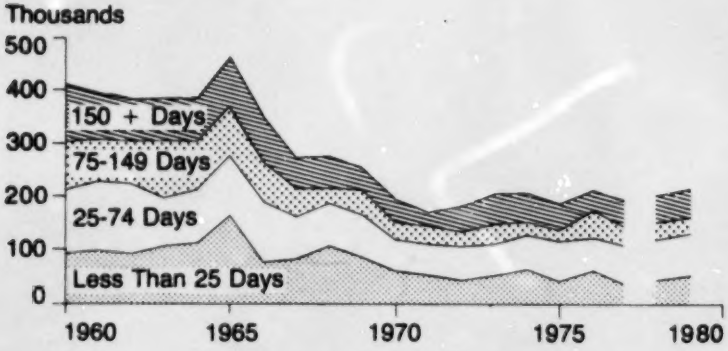
Migrant Farmworkers

Migrant farmworkers provide a necessary supplement to local labor supplies during planting and harvesting seasons when the demand for labor sometimes exceeds the supply of farmworkers living in a local area. But contrary to some popular impressions, the hired farm labor force is not dominated by migrants. Migrant farmworkers are defined as those persons who leave their home county, stay overnight, and do farmwork for cash wages or salary. They constituted only 8 percent of the 2.7 million persons doing hired farmwork in 1979. The proportion of the hired farm work force that is migrant remained fairly constant in the seventies, but decreased from the 10- to 14-percent range common in the sixties.

Since 1960, the number of migratory workers declined by almost 50 percent, falling from about 400,000 in 1960 to 217,000 in 1979 (fig. 4). However, the decline has not been continuous from year to year. The number of migrants increased sharply to 466,000 workers between 1964 and 1965. This increase represented a temporary adjustment to the termination of the

Figure 4.

Migrant Farmworkers, by Days of Farmwork, 1960-79[1]



[1]Data for 1978 are not available.
Source: (9)

Bracero Program as farmers replaced foreign workers with domestic labor. The number of migrants declined steadily between 1965 and 1970, but since 1970 the number has remained relatively stable at around 200,000.

In summary, in 1979, migrant workers as a group differed from other hired farmworkers in some basic characteristics:

- Migrants were more likely to be members of minority groups than nonmigrants. In 1979, about 62 percent of the migrants were Whites, 27 percent were Hispanics, and 11 percent were Blacks and Others. By contrast, nonmigrant workers were 75 percent White, 11 percent Hispanic, and 14 percent Black and Other (see fig. 1).

- Migrants earned an average of $4,852 in annual earnings, with $2,277 coming from farmwork;

nonmigrants earned $4,126 with $2,459 coming from farmwork.

- Migrants were more likely to combine nonfarmwork with farmwork. About 55 percent of the migrants did both farmwork and nonfarmwork compared with only 41 percent of the nonmigrants.

- Migrants appeared to be more economically dependent on nonfarm earnings than nonmigratory workers. Over half of their total earnings came from nonfarmwork while only 40 percent of nonmigrant total earnings came from nonfarm activities.

- Some migrants traveled considerable distances to do farmwork. Almost one-third were employed in farm jobs over 500 miles from their homes, while about 14 percent traveled 1,000 or more miles. Hispanics tended to travel longer distances than Whites, who were more likely to be short-distance migrants.

In other characteristics, however, migrants were about the same as nonmigrants:

- About 55 percent were less than 25 years of age; 22 percent were between 14 and 17 years old.

- Almost one-third were students and out of the labor force most of the year.

- 76 percent were males.

- Less than half were household heads.

- 4 out of 10 resided in the South at the time of the survey, and over half of these were Hispanics or Blacks and Others.

Hired Farmworker Families

Some farmworker issues are centered on economic conditions and needs of the farmworker's family. The socioeconomic characteristics of farmworker families are diverse, ranging from the low-income family where the household head is a farmworker and the family's only source of income is from hired farmwork, to the high-income family where the farmworker is a spouse, son, or daughter working only a few days in the summer.

One study showed that approximately 2 million families in the United States contained at least one hired farmworker in 1975 (*13*). That study also showed that farmworker families, as a group, were one of the most economically disadvantaged groups in the Nation. Their 1975 median family income was $8,522, about 72 percent of the median income for all U.S. families. However, when family income is examined in relation to family size, farmworkers are at a greater disadvantage than income levels alone suggest. Farmworker families tend to be much larger than other families at all income levels. This places a greater than average per capita demand on family income. For example, of those farmworker families receiving incomes below $5,000, the majority (54 percent) had at least three members and almost one-fifth contained six members or more. By contrast, the majority of all U.S. families with incomes below $5,000 contained only one or two members.

The racial/ethnic composition of farmworker families was about the same as the composition of other families. Over three-fourths of the families were White, 8 percent were Hispanic, and 15 percent were Black and Other in 1975. The minority farmworker families in general were more economically disadvantaged than White families. White farmworker families received a median family income of over $10,000, compared with $5,939 for Hispanic and $4,339 for Black and Other families. Also, only 22 percent of the White families had six or more members compared with 45 percent of Hispanic and 31 percent of Black and Other families. Heads of minority farmworker families, whether they did farmwork or not,

completed fewer years of schooling than White family heads. Lower educational levels of minority household heads tended to restrict opportunities to move into higher paying jobs and thereby limited opportunities to improve the family's economic status.

The largest proportion (39 percent) of farmworker families was located in the South and, in general, these families had lower incomes than families in other regions. The median family income for farmworker families in the South was $5,912 compared with $9,439 in the West and over $10,000 in the Northeast and North Central States. Farmworker income problems in the South were further complicated by poor accessibility to public services, such as health care, education, vocational training, housing, and welfare programs (*14, 19*).

Hired farmworker families included 8.2 million family members, averaging 4.1 members per family. A large proportion of these were dependents. About 26 percent were children under the age of 14 years; another 3 percent were 65 years of age and over. More than one-third of the dependents lived in minority families, although minority families constituted only 23 percent of all farmworker families.

Half of the 2 million hired farmworker families were headed by a person who did farmwork at some time during the year. The remaining families contained a family member other than the head who did farmwork. The characteristics of these two groups differed significantly.

Families headed by a farmworker were more economically disadvantaged than farmworker families headed by a nonfarm worker. About 37 percent of the farmworker-headed families had an income of less than $5,000, compared with only 14 percent of other farmworker families. The median family income for the families headed by a farmworker was $6,250, compared with over $10,000 for families in which the farmworker was not the household head. A large part of the family earnings for the farmworker-headed families was from relatively low-paying farm jobs held by the head of household.

By contrast, most farmworkers who were not household heads were not responsible for the major share of family support. Students and housewives made up a large proportion of the workers who did farmwork for only a few weeks during the year. In most cases, the bulk of their family income came from the earnings of the family head who was employed in nonfarm activities. For example, in 1975, farmworkers who were not family heads earned an average of $1,300 from all sources, and more than half worked less than 25 days at farmwork. On the other hand, farmworker heads averaged $6,500 in annual earnings with over half the earnings derived from farmwork.

In 1975, 143,000, or 7 percent, of all farmworker families had at least one member who did migratory farmwork. The information on characteristics of migrant families is limited, but available data suggest that family size and income do not differ significantly from all hired farmworker families. In 1979, 25 percent of migrant families received incomes of less than $5,000. They had a median family income of $8,607 and averaged 3.7 members per family, compared with $8,522 and 4.1 members per family for all hired farmworker families.

Migrant families included about 550,000 household members. One-fourth of these members were children under 14 years old. However, the data do not show the proportion of children who traveled with their parents or other family members in the migrant stream, or what proportion actually did farmwork themselves during the year.

In summary, the socioeconomic characteristics of hired farmworkers and their families indicate that there are two distinct groups of hired farmworkers. One group is comprised of those who are engaged in hired farmwork on a casual or seasonal basis and use their earnings from farmwork to supplement family income; they are generally young and/or White; the majority cite attending school or keeping house as their primary activity, but some are primarily employed at nonfarm work; and half of the group does nonfarm work.

The second group consists of persons who are more dependent on hired farmwork for their livelihood and family support; they are employed in agriculture for longer periods during the year than the casual and seasonal group, and often cite hired farmwork as their principal activity. For the large majority, farmwork is their only employment. When they do off-farm work, it is usually only for short periods of time. The workers are older and are often household heads or spouses who have primary responsibility for their families' support, probably receiving much of the family income from farmwork. They are more likely to be members of racial/ethnic minorities, and their agricultural dependence is partially due to the lack of employment alternatives to farmwork.

FARM LABOR TRENDS FOR THE EIGHTIES

Farm labor in the last three decades showed dramatic changes, and definite employment trends emerged in the seventies. Hired employment stabilized during the seventies after years of decline, while farm family employment continued to decrease. These changes show what has happened, but what do they suggest for farm labor requirements in the eighties?

A number of factors will determine farm labor use in the eighties: technological development, changes in the structure of agriculture, farm programs, farmworker programs, immigration policy, relative prices of major farm inputs—especially energy, and legislative developments on collective bargaining for farmworkers. The many unknowns regarding future changes in these factors and in the interaction among these factors make attempts to estimate farm labor requirements in the eighties a difficult task.

However, two sets of USDA estimates are useful in discussing farm labor trends for the eighties. First, it is estimated that the number of farms will likely continue to decline, while the size of farms will continue to increase to the year 2000 (7). Second, a study concludes that American agriculture will have adequate

capacity to produce in the eighties (1). This conclusion is based on projections of agricultural productivity and farm output. Problems involving labor, cropland, water, and manufactured inputs are not expected to be major constraints on farm production in the near future.

The two sets of projections suggest that the recent trend of substituting hired labor for farm family labor will likely continue in the eighties. The increase in the hired labor proportion of total farm employment is likely to be small in any year, but should gradually increase in the eighties. Factors that could change this trend are unexpected shifts in the demand for farm products and unexpected changes in relative prices of major agricultural inputs.

The characteristics of the hired farm work force suggest that enough workers should seek employment in agriculture to meet overall demand. The hired farm labor market is highly fragmented. Although there are exceptions, the amount of hired labor required on a per farm basis is small, and most farmwork requires little work experience, few skills, and is of a seasonal nature. In 1979, nearly half of all farmworkers were teenagers, housewives, and other persons who did farmwork on a temporary basis. Another 19 percent were primarily nonfarm-workers who took farm employment on a part-time basis (19).

Some exceptions to the general trend may occur. The potential exists for periodic farm labor shortages in areas with concentrations of farms which require many workers. During periods of peak labor demand, the need for labor frequently exceeds the local labor supply. In those situations, additional workers must be recruited from outside the local community. Problems associated with recruitment or labor-management conflicts could lead to local labor shortages.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE CURRENT SITUATION

The data and analysis suggest several policy issues related to the welfare of the workers and their families. Public policy

responses to hired farmworker issues have generally focused on problems related to stability of employment, levels and stability of wages, quality of work environment, and family well-being. Policy issues related to the welfare of farmworker families are inseparable from issues related to employment, wages, and the working environment because work and wage conditions are closely linked to economic and social conditions which impact directly on the well-being of the family, including housing, health, and education.

The hired farmworker characteristics mentioned before and summarized as follows tend to define policy issues:

- Income is at or near the bottom of the income scale for all occupations.
- Families tend to be larger than average, placing a greater than average per capita demand on family income.
- Economic conditions are worse for migrant families because of the transient nature of the work.
- Workers with few alternatives to farmwork must often find several short-term jobs during the year to earn even a minimal annual income. This may require migrant work.
- The structure of agricultural employment has changed in recent decades with hired employment increasing relative to farm operator and farm family employment, placing a new set of labor-management responsibilities on farm operators and workplace responsibilities on the worker.

Thus, two major groups appear to require different policy considerations. One group depends on farmwork for a significant part of its income. Many workers in this group also do nonfarmwork, but farmwork is the group's central employment focus. The workers normally have low labor

market skills, little education, and seem to have little opportunity for employment in higher skilled, higher wage occupations in either agriculture or nonagricultural industries. Workers in the second group include persons who work on a casual or seasonal basis, usually as a means of supplementing individual or family income. These workers spend most of their time at nonfarm employment, attending school, keeping house, or pursuing other nonlabor market activities.

One set of policy issues and needs relates to both groups of workers. These concern the lack of employee benefits and workplace protections generally available to other workers in the economy, including minimum wage guarantees, farm safety regulations, and such social benefits as workers' compensation, unemployment insurance, and social security. In recent years, labor and safety law coverage has increased for farmworkers, but the special exemption for agriculture based on size of operation still exists in most legislation (3).

It is not enough, however, to demonstrate that current policies on minimum wage or social security contribute to inequity in income or employment opportunities among workers. Estimates of the impacts of proposed changes are also required for effective policy decisions. An increased minimum wage, for example, could affect the number of employed workers, duration of employment, workers' earnings, and income of farm operators. This type of impact analysis requires better information than is generally available.

The group that depends on farmwork for a significant part of family income is the most logical primary target for farmworker policy, mainly because it has few alternatives for other employment. Several issues focus on this group of workers, including stability of employment and earnings, national farmworker programs, and impact of technology on agriculture.

Stability of Employment and Farm Earnings

Annual earnings are determined by the wage rate and duration of employment. In addition to low wages, much of hired

farmwork is characterized by periods of employment lasting only a few days or weeks. About 71 percent of the hired farm work force worked less than 150 days in agriculture in 1979. The year-round worker was the exception rather than the rule. Only 16 percent were employed 250 days or more on farms. Furthermore, many of these workers held several jobs during the year to piece together year-round employment (9). Income stability could be enhanced by greater stability in employment spurring families toward better housing, more adequate health care, and higher levels of education.

Improving the stability of farm employment and farm wages will require changes in the way farm jobs are viewed by both the farm operator and the worker. Farm operators have traditionally had little incentive to improve the stability of farm employment. Workers are hired to do specific tasks, and employment is frequently terminated as soon as the tasks are completed. This pattern of employment has evolved because of the seasonal nature of farmwork and because there usually has been an adequate supply of farmworkers available from either domestic or foreign sources.

Most farm tasks are associated with planting and harvesting. The labor required to operate the farm between these periods of peak labor demand traditionally has been provided by family labor. There are, of course, exceptions to this pattern—many livestock farms require year-round hired labor, but as noted earlier, only 16 percent of all workers are employed year-round.

The structure of farming has changed significantly in recent decades altering the composition of the farm labor force. As hired workers provide more of the labor used on farms, farm operators must assume more labor-management responsibilities if they are to compete for workers in the farm labor market. The better managers will improve their personnel management skills in order to minimize hiring, turnover, and training costs. This includes improving skills related to recruiting, supervising, training, developing work plans, work assignments, and employee benefit packages; understanding Federal, State and local employment, safety and health

regulations; and being knowledgeable of labor relations and labor contract negotiations procedures.

Contemporary personnel management encourages workers to take responsibility for their work assignments. This should result in greater labor productivity, greater attachment to the work force, and higher quality performance. This, of course, requires a greater commitment by workers to do quality work.

An educational effort may be needed to improve the level of personnel management. Many farm operators and farm managers would benefit from education and training on relevant labor laws and regulations, as well as training in principles of personnel management.

National Farmworker Programs

Currently, eight Federal programs have special provisions for farmworkers (table 3). The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973 (CETA), for example, authorized the U.S. Department of Labor to provide educational opportunities, job training and placement, family counseling and child care, and other services to seasonal and migrant farmworkers. Other Federal farmworker programs provide free or low-cost health services to migrants and their families, support physically or mentally disabled farmworkers, provide funds to local school districts for the education of migrant children, enforce safety regulations for the transportation of farmworkers, provide employment services, provide loans and grants to farm operators for construction of onfarm housing for farmworkers, and enforce safety regulations of crew leaders and farm labor contractors. The budgets for these programs were approximately $400 million in 1979, nearly double the level in 1975. Despite increased funding, these programs have received relatively little evaluation. Additional research is required to determine the impact of Federal programs on farmworkers, their families, farm operators, and the farm labor market.

Table 3—Annual budgets for Federal migrant and seasonal farmworker programs, fiscal years 1975-79

Programs provided by:	1979	1978	1977	1976	1975
			Million dollars		
Section 303, Comprehensive Employment and Training Act, 1973[1]	95.3	111.0	63.8	75.2	63.2
Rehabilitation Act, 1973[2]	1.5	1.5	.6	1.5	.7
Interstate Commerce Act, 1957[3]	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Public Health Act, 1962[4]	34.5	34.5	30.0	25.0	23.8
Elementary and Secondary Education Act, 1967[5]	173.5	145.8	130.9	97.1	91.9
Housing Act, 1949[6]	71.0	17.5	17.5	17.5	17.5
Grants	38.0	7.5	7.5	7.5	7.5
Loans	33.0	10.0	10.0	10.0	10.0
Wagner-Peyser Act, 1934[7]	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Farm Labor Contactor Registration Act, 1963[8]	2.3	2.1	1.2	1.1	.5
Total	378.1	312.4	244.0	217.4	197.6

NA = Not available.
[1] Provides training assistance with budgets reported by calendar year.
[2] Supports physically or mentally disabled farmworkers.
[3] Enforces safety regulations for transportation of farmworkers.
[4] Provides primary health care and supplemental services.
[5] Provides funds to local school districts for education of children of migrant workers.
[6] Makes loans and grants to farm operators for construction of onfarm housing for farmworkers.
[7] Provides employment placement and related services.
[8] Enforces regulations of crew leaders and farm labor contractors.
Source: The budget data are from unpublished sources in the respective departments.

Impacts of Technological Development on Farm Employment

Technological development, including labor-reducing machines, higher yielding crops and livestock, and chemicals which improve yields, have had significant impacts on labor productivity in agriculture. In almost every case, the adoption of new technology has reduced labor input per unit of output, while expanding output of agricultural commodities.

Although technological development has had significant impacts on farm employment, the evaluations of technology have not usually looked at the effects on hired farm employment. However, employment impact research, as a part of the evaluative process of technological development, could be a significant tool for improving employment and wage stability. For example, technology has the potential to create varieties of fruits and vegetables which could be harvested over longer periods of time, thus increasing the stability of farm employment (5).

Data Requirements

There is a need for better information for analysis of policy issues, legislation and regulations, and to assess the impact of legislation, technological developments, and other social and economic changes on employment levels and income of hired farmworkers. The only comprehensive data presently available on the number and characteristics of farmworkers and their households come from a survey conducted by the Census Bureau for the Economic Research Service as part of the December Current Population Survey. This survey was conducted annually until 1977, and is now conducted biennially.

The Hired Farm Working Force Survey has shortcomings which limit its usefulness as a data source for analysis of policy issues. It provides national-level data and regional estimates of numbers of workers, duration of employment, and some key worker and household characteristics for farmworker groups

having special policy significance, such as migrants, Hispanics, and youth. However, these data are inadequate for analysis of issues related to farm labor markets below the national level. For example, analyses of State-level markets are often necessary for policy purposes because the demand for labor varies significantly from State to State, depending on the type and structure of agriculture. Farms in the Southwestern and Pacific Coast States employ more hired labor relative to family labor than do farms in the Corn Belt and Southeastern States. The State variations in the use of hired labor create different requirements for various State farm labor markets. Until State-level data are available, analyses of many issues will be incomplete and policies based on the analyses may not include elements important to the proper functioning of farm labor markets and to the well-being of farmworkers and their families.

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